



## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **The Global Rabies Prevention Initiative Reminds Us to *Take Steps to Reduce Your Risk***

Eau Claire, Wisconsin – September 26, 2013 – The Eau Claire City-County Health Department will be promoting rabies prevention awareness and education by celebrating World Rabies Day on September 28. Despite being 100% preventable, it is estimated that 55,000 people die worldwide from rabies each year, approximately one person every ten minutes.

The Eau Claire City-County Health Department will join the list of international partners who are *Working Together to Make Rabies History!* “If we want to build a world without rabies, awareness is our most powerful tool,” said Lieske Giese, Director of the Eau Claire City-County Health Department.

As temperatures drop, bats and other animals seek shelter indoors. Your local health officials are encouraging people to take steps to reduce the risk of exposure to rabies. Wisconsin is home to at least eight bat species, and some make their homes in our structures. This increases the chance for accidental contact with people, and between bats and other animals.

People who have had physical contact with a bat or other wild animal, even without a known bite, should have the animal captured if it is safe to do so and held until a public health official can be consulted. Then health officials can determine if the animal is infected and if people exposed to them require rabies vaccinations. About 3 to 4 percent of bats tested are infected with the rabies virus. Eau Claire has had 36 bat exposures this year already. Skunks also spread the virus, and domestic animals in urban and rural areas can become infected from exposure to these wild animals.

There have been three cases of human rabies in Wisconsin since 2000. Between 2006 and 2010, 123 wild animals and two domestic pets were diagnosed with rabies. Eau Claire has had 5 positive bats since 2006.

In addition to avoiding contact with bats, the health department recommends the following measures to reduce exposure to rabies:

- Vaccinate pet dogs, cats, ferrets and livestock against rabies.
- Enforce leash laws and contact local associations if help is needed to shelter and find homes for stray dogs and cats.
- Stay away from all wild animals.
- Teach children not to approach any unfamiliar animals. “Love your own, leave others alone.”
- Do not keep wild animals as pets.
- Keep screens in good repair and close any small opening bats could enter.

- Individuals traveling to developing counties where rabies is highly prevalent, or who are at ongoing risk of possible rabies exposure, such as veterinarians, pet groomers, and animal control officers, should ask their doctor about receiving pre-exposure rabies vaccinations.

In the event of an exposure to a wild animal or domestic pet, contact:

- City of Eau Claire – call the Communication Center for the Eau Claire Police Department Animal Control at 715-839-4972.
- County of Eau Claire – call the Eau Claire County Humane Association at 715-839-4747.
- People can also call the Eau Claire City-County Health Department at 715-839-4718.

Additional information is available online at <http://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/communicable/rabies/> or at <http://www.rabiesalliance.org/> or by calling the Eau Claire City-County Health Department at 715-839-4718.

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